

HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA

The constitution of the United States provides in Article III that "The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish." The United States District Court for the Western District of Louisiana has been ordained and established by the Congress. **28 U.S.C. 98(c)** However, the road that leads to the present court had many twists and turns.

In 1804, Congress established a United States District Court in the Territory of Orleans. This was the first federal court in what today comprises the State of Louisiana. There was one judge, Dominic Augustin Hall.

In 1812, Congress created the United States District Court for the State of Louisiana. The court was authorized one (1) judgeship. Judge Dominic Augustin Hall continued to serve on this court until 1921, when he was replaced by Judge John Dick.

In 1823, Congress divided the court into two (2) districts, the Eastern District of Louisiana and the Western District of Louisiana. Judge John Dick was authorized to sit in both districts. He was succeeded in 1824 by Judge Thomas B. Roberson, who served through 1828. In 1829 Samuel H. Harper was appointed district judge and served until 1841. In 1841, Theodore H. McCaleb was appointed as district judge.

Prior to 1837, the federal courts in Louisiana were not assigned to a circuit. In 1837, the Louisiana courts were assigned to the Ninth Circuit, and, in 1842, the Louisiana courts were reassigned to the Fifth Circuit, where they remain to this time.

In 1845, Congress combined the Eastern and Western Districts into a single court for the District of Louisiana. Judge Theodore H. McCaleb continued to serve as the single judge of the court.

In 1849, Congress re-divided the court into the Eastern and Western Districts. A new judgeship was created for the Western District of Louisiana. Henry Boyce was appointed district judge for the Western District of Louisiana and served until 1861, when Louisiana seceded from the United States to join the Confederate States of America.

In 1866 after the conclusion of the civil war, Congress once again joined the two districts into a single district for the State of Louisiana with one authorized judgeship. Edward Henry Durell was appointed judge and served until 1874, when he was replaced by Edward Coke Billings.

In 1881, Congress once again divided the court and established the present Western District of

Louisiana with one authorized judgeship. Alexander Boarman was appointed as district judge for the court and served until 1916. In 1917, George Whitfield Jack was appointed district judge and served until 1924. In 1924, Benjamin C. Dawkins, Sr. was appointed as judge of the court and served until 1953.

In 1938, a second judgeship was created for this court. The following year, in 1939, Gaston Louis Porterie was appointed to fill this judgeship. He served until 1953.

In 1953, there were two judicial vacancies. Benjamin C. Dawkins, Jr. and Edwin F. Hunter, Jr. were appointed to fill these vacancies. Judge Benjamin C. Dawkins, Jr. served until 1973 when he took senior status. He continued to serve the court as a senior judge until his death in 1984. Judge Edwin F. Hunter, Jr. took senior status in 1976 and served as a senior district judge in this court in the Lake Charles Division until his death in 2002.

In 1961, Congress created a third judgeship for the Western District of Louisiana. Richard J. Putnam was appointed to this position and took senior status in 1975. Judge Putnam served until his death in 2003.

In 1970, Congress created a fourth judgeship for this court. Nauman Steele Scott was appointed to this position in 1970. Judge Scott took senior status in 1984 and served in that capacity until his death in 2001.

In 1974, after Judge Dawkins, Jr. took senior status, Thomas E. Stagg, Jr. was appointed as district judge. Judge Stagg served until 1992 when he assumed senior status. Judge Stagg continues to serve the court through the present time in the Shreveport Division.

In 1976, after Judge Putnam took senior status, W. Eugene Davis was appointed district judge. He served in that capacity in the Lafayette Division until 1983 when he was elevated to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In 1977, after Judge Hunter assumed senior status, Earl Ernest Veron was appointed to the position of district judge. Judge Veron served in the Lake Charles Division until his death in 1990.

In 1978, Congress created the fifth judgeship for the Western District of Louisiana. John Malach Shaw was appointed district judge in 1979 and served until 1996 when he took senior status. Judge Shaw served the court as a senior judge in the Lafayette/Opelousas Division until his death in 1999.

In 1984, Congress added a sixth judgeship to the Western District of Louisiana. In 1985, Donald E. Walter was appointed to this new judgeship. Judge Walter served as an active judge of this court until 2001, when he took senior status. Judge Walter continues to serve as a senior judge in the Shreveport Division.

In 1984, when Judge Davis was appointed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, John M. Duhe, Jr. was appointed to fill the judicial vacancy. Judge Duhe served on the court in the Lafayette

Division until he too was elevated to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1988.

Also in 1984, when Judge Scott took senior status, F. A. Little, Jr. was appointed as district judge. Judge Little continues served the court at the Alexandria Division, and served as Chief Judge from 1996 to 2002. He serves the court as a senior judge at this time.

In 1991, when Judge Duhe went to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, Richard T. Haik was selected to fill the vacancy. Judge Haik was selected as Chief Judge of he court in 2002 and continues to serve on the court at the Lafayette/Opelousas Division.

Also in 1991, James T. Trimble, Jr. was selected to fill the vacancy created by Judge Veron's death. Judge Trimble was the first magistrate judge in this district to be elevated to the position of district judge. Judge Trimble served the court in the Lake Charles Division. In 2003, Judge Trimble took senior status and serves the court in that capacity at the present time.

In 1990, Congress created a seventh judgeship for the Western District of Louisiana. Rebecca F. Doherty was appointed to fill this position in 1991. Judge Doherty, who is the first woman to serve on the court, is still in active service with the court at the Lafayette/Opelousas Division.

In 1994, Tucker L. Melançon was appointed to fill the vacancy resulting from Judge Stagg taking senior status. Judge Melançon is still an active judge with the court, serving in the Lafayette/Opelousas Division.

In 1998, the vacancy created by the assumption of senior status of Judge Shaw was filled by Robert G. James. Judge James serves as a district judge in the Monroe Division at this time.

In 2003, three vacancies resulting from Judges Walter, Little and Trimble taking senior status were filled. Judge Dee. D. Drell was appointed to serve in the Alexandria Division; Judge Patricia H. Minaldi was appointed to serve in the Lake Charles Division and Judge Maurice Hicks was appointed to serve in the Shreveport Division.

In 1949, Congress created the position of chief judge of the district court. The chief judges who have served in this district are: Judge Benjamin C. Dawkins, Sr. (1949-1953), Benjamin C. Dawkins, Jr. (1953-1973), Judge Edwin F. Hunter, Jr. (1973-1976), Judge Nauman S. Scott (1976-1984), Judge Tom Stagg, (1984-1991), Judge John M. Shaw (1991-1996), Judge F. A. Little, Jr. (1996-2002), and Judge Richard T. Haik (2002-present).

The Western District of Louisiana presently consists of 42 of the 64 parishes in Louisiana. Until 1984, the district consisted of six (6) statutory divisions, named for the six (6) authorized places of holding court, to wit: Alexandria, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, Opelousas and Shreveport. In 1984, at the request of the court, Congress abolished statutory divisions in the Western District of Louisiana, but retained the authorized places of holding court. **28 U.S.C. 98(c)**. Today, the court is divided into five administrative divisions: Alexandria, Lafayette/Opelousas, Lake Charles, Monroe, and Shreveport. **LR 77.3W** These divisions are set by vote of the authorized judges in the court.

